

## Challenges of Peacekeeping in Africa

By

James W. Swigert

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of International Organization Affairs

(The following is from a Statement before the Africa Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee Washington, DC October 8, 2004 (As delivered))

---

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Payne, distinguished members of the committee. I welcome this opportunity to appear before you to discuss challenges of peacekeeping in Africa. And, with your permission, I request that my written statement be entered into the record.

This is a timely hearing, Mr. Chairman. As the committee is well-aware, there has been literally an explosion in the growth of peacekeeping in Africa in this past year. Since October 2003, we've seen three new peacekeeping missions in Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, and Burundi, and the Security Council just last week authorized a major expansion of the mission in Congo, the MONUC mission. The African continent, as you pointed out, Mr. Chairman, now hosts seven of the UN's 16 peacekeeping operations, including the two largest ones, MONUC, and UNMIL in Liberia. The Security Council resolutions currently authorize over 37,000 UN peacekeepers in Africa, and that's out of 54,000 worldwide.

Over the near term, increased demand for UN peacekeepers in Africa we judge is likely, even as some missions like UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone are drawing down. As you know, planning has begun for a new mission in Sudan, contingent on a north-south peace agreement, and the UN is actively supporting the planning for expansion of the African Union monitoring mission in Darfur. Given the priority that the United States puts on bringing an end to their horrific violence in Darfur and securing completion of a north-south peace agreement, we have encouraged and we are actively supporting these UN

efforts. The UN needs to be ready to help the people of Sudan with peacekeepers once the conditions are right.

The UN itself sees challenges ahead in Africa and across the board concerning peacekeeping. UN Secretary General Annan has warned that the number and scope of UN peace operations are approaching what may be their highest levels ever, improving prospects of conflict resolution, to be sure, but stretching thin the capacities of the system. There are lessons clearly to be learned from past operations, but I would submit, Mr. Chairman, that success depends most of all on adapting each mission to individual circumstances. Each operation is unique. The task of UNMEE on the static Ethiopian-Eritrean border, bears little resemblance to the multi-dimensional tasks of UNMIL in Liberia, for example.

As you know, the United States pays the largest share of the costs of UN peacekeeping, currently 27.1%, and as the number and scope of operations goes up, that means costs are going up for the U.S. taxpayers. I can assure you that we at the State Department and in the International Organization Bureau take seriously our responsibilities to ensure good stewardship of taxpayer dollars. We approve UN peacekeeping operations only when we judge them to be absolutely necessary, in United States' interest, right-sized, with a viable exit strategy, and only after extensive consultation with the Congress.

In accordance with the American Servicemen's Protection Act, we also

scrutinize missions to ensure that American soldiers and UN peacekeeping operations are protected from possible assertions of jurisdiction by the International Criminal Court. Through the U.S. interagency process, we examine UN reports on peacekeeping, taking them for what they are: recommendations. And the eventual resolutions voted by the Security Council often differ significantly from UN Secretariat recommendations.

To take the most recent case of MONUC, the secretariat had recommended expansion of the mission from 10,800 troops to 23,900, and its extension into vast new areas in the Congo. We eventually voted in favor of an expansion of the force to 16,700, reinforcing it in problematic zones, but declining to accept that MONUC deploy into provinces where it was not already present.

We regularly review ongoing UN peacekeeping operations to ensure that they are right-sized. Recent examples of downsizing in Africa as a result of such reviews include operations in Ethiopia and Sierra Leone. And I note your interest, Mr. Chairman, in Western Sahara and the operation there. At our urging, the Security Council has requested the secretary general to review the mission in Western Sahara.

Peacekeeping has changed dramatically over the past two decades, and the patrolling of the static cease-fire line, which was once the norm, is now the exception. UN peacekeepers are regularly charged with responsibility not only of protecting themselves, but in many cases also innocent civilians in their areas of operations. There is a tendency, once a UN mission is on the ground, to expect sometimes more from it than it can do.

We need to be realistic about UN peacekeeping. We want the UN to succeed, not to fail, and we are therefore careful not to ask more of the UN than it can reasonably

do. As we review proposals for new missions and extensions of existing ones, we strive to ensure the UN missions which are often being sent to operate in dangerous places are properly trained, equipped and staffed to succeed.

The high end of the spectrum of peace operations includes the most challenging tasks, and for the forces engaged peace enforcement can prove much the same as warfare. Such tasks, we feel, are not well suited for the UN, rather coalitions of willing and able forces with a militarily strong state in the lead are better instruments. A good recent example, which I believe, Congressman Payne, you referred to, was the intervention by the Economic Organization of West African States, ECOWAS, in the seriously destabilized Liberia in mid-2003.

ECOWAS became the vanguard for the UN force established several months later, and it is important as we work on these peacekeeping issues that we work very closely with regional organizations like ECOWAS, like the African Union. They have repeatedly stepped in with the encouragement and the support of the United States and others in the international community. ECOWAS did so not just in Liberia but in Cote d'Ivoire in 2002, the AU did so in Burundi in 2003, and most recently the AU has gone to the Darfur region of Sudan with troops to protect AU ceasefire monitors and is in the process of vastly expanding this critical mission.

The willingness of African states to step up to the challenge has been exemplary. Mr. Chairman, the U.S. has strongly supported the secretary general's efforts to reform UN peacekeeping operations. As a result of the Brahimi Report of a few years ago, the UN has implemented reforms and more is being done. But UN reform is only part of the answer to meet the peacekeeping challenges. Another important part is to work with our

African partners and with other donors to improve the capability of the African armed forces for peacekeeping.

There are a number of U.S. programs underway. I'm sure the committee is well aware of ACOTA, the Enhanced International Peacekeeping Capabilities program, EIPC. You mentioned, Mr. Chairman, the Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative. At Sea Island the president discussed this issue with his G-8 colleagues and they committed to an action plan to enhance global peacekeeping, with an emphasis on Africa and building up African capabilities.

In fact, as we meet today in this important hearing, my colleagues at the State Department are meeting with their colleagues address any questions that you might have from the G-8, from the African Union, from the European Union to discuss how we can better coordinate our respective efforts in Africa with an initial focus on civilian policing and strengthening the headquarter staffs of the ECOWAS and the African Union.

While all the efforts of African regional organizations, the UN and outside donors are critical in meeting the challenges of peacekeeping in Africa, Mr. Chairman, the most important element for success in conflict resolution is one that is perhaps the hardest to judge and the most difficult to foster. And that is the political commitment of the protagonists to the peace process that they are engaged in. Success of UN peacekeeping in particular depends on the readiness of the parties involved to commit to peace and to make the political compromises inherent to any peace process. That indeed is a key challenge for all of us.